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State sets up contest for towns to get funds

■ Iowa will identify and offer money to three 'great places' to live.

By JON ERICSON
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"It sounds really good," said Al Hayes, professor of public policy at the University of Northern Iowa. "I hope they can implement it well."

trucks for Iowa's Great Places.

In promoting the proposal, Walker took great care in trying to take old government terms out of her vocabulary. This is not a project, but an initiative or a concept. Communities will not submit applications but will invite the state to visit their communities.

The deadline for invitations is July 1. That's little more than a month for the area to come up with one or more plans to present.

Those who are chosen will have a team of coaches helping them develop their plan. The coaches, and not the local communities, will be in charge of identifying the state agencies that can help out and making connections.

"What we wanted to do was create a way for us to identify all of these elements and pull them all together for your great place," Walker said.

The state allocated \$300,000 to start the program. The amount or type of assistance for the entire program is being determined.

Walker listed criteria that plans would need to meet for approval. They would require community support, clear and quick results, planned evolution and represent a diversity of ideas. Communities will have to come up with local matches in effort and money.

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CEDAR FALLS — The concept sounds both grand and simple: Focus all of the state's resources on making communities better places to live, work and play.

Gov. Tom Vilsack backed a new initiative this year called Iowa Great Places. The idea is to have local communities come up with concepts to make them unique, livable and worthy of visits. Now the state is taking the show on the road and challenging communities to make the program work.

On Wednesday, Anita Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, came to the Oster Regent Theatre to outline the idea to area leaders and ask them to make a case for making the community a "great place."

If successful, they could receive funding, marketing expertise and a host of services from the state.

The state will identify three such great places at the end of the year. From there, the chosen communities have a year to show that the state help went to good use.

The crowd Wednesday came from Waterloo, Cedar Falls, Waverly and as far as Elkader.

Hayes hopes a plan can be created that benefits the Waterloo and Cedar Falls area as a whole or even encompass other towns in the area.

Waverly City Council member Connie Rasmussen also was excited about the possibilities. She commended the state on pooling its resources.

"I think a lot of it is getting people to learn to think outside the box," Rasmussen said.

Walker talked about thinking outside the box in her presentation. She said the idea of getting the various departments of the state government to work together is, in itself, a novel concept.

She said representatives from 18 state departments discussed Vilsack's plan. After a cool initial period, she said department heads got past their territorial approach and found ideas.

For example, she said someone from the state Alcoholic Beverages Division said they had hundreds of trucks supplying stores all over the state. They suggested advertising on the sides of the

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